

HALL OF RECORDS
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

NINTH ANNUAL REPORT

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF MOTION PICTURE CENSORS



1924-1925

OFFICES
211 NORTH CALVERT STREET
BALTIMORE - MARYLAND

Ninth Annual Report

MARYLAND STATE BOARD

of

MOTION PICTURE CENSORS

1924-1925

GEORGE HELLER
Chairman

ASA C. SHARP
Vice Chairman

MARIE WHITE PRESSTMAN
Secretary and Treasurer

HELEN L. ODOM
Chief Clerk

OFFICES
211 NORTH CALVERT STREET
BALTIMORE - MARYLAND

To His Excellency,

HONORABLE ALBERT C. RITCHIE,
Governor of Maryland.

In compliance with the provisions of Article 66A, Annotated Code of Maryland, Chapter 390, Section 9, we have the honor to submit to you the Ninth Annual Report of the Maryland State Board of Motion Picture Censors, together with an account of the receipts and disbursements of that office for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1925.

This report shows an increase over previous years in the number of films, both original and duplicate, submitted for examination. The total number of films reviewed during the past year was 3,442 originals and 2,736 duplicates, the previous year 3,080 original films having been presented for censorship, and 2,432 duplicates or prints of the original.

Of a total of 6,178 films examined last year, 5,167 were approved, 3 were rejected, and 1,008 were subject to elimination. Two of the rejected prints were later passed in a reconstructed form. The percentage of films ordered eliminated is practically the same as the previous year when cuts were made in 897 subjects, or approximately one-sixth of the total number of films reviewed. No improvement in the moral quality of the total output was noted, although credit must be given the industry for the excellent quality of a large percentage of films reviewed.

In the films ordered eliminated some of the cuts were so drastic that the producers preferred to withdraw their productions rather than comply with the Board's ruling. In other cases, films have been reconstructed at the studios and resubmitted in a form acceptable to the Board. In such cases, no seal of approval is issued until the applicant signifies his acceptance of the ruling of the Board, and signs an affidavit stating that eliminations are agreed to, and have been made as directed.

A large percentage of the films eliminated were those in which sex relations were over emphasized. Scenes of indiscriminate kissing and embracing were far too common, and hundreds of feet of film were deleted in order to make some subjects fit for the public, especially young people, to witness. Scenarios dealing with illicit love, marital relations, and the eternal triangle, are screened in ever increasing number, and the reaction of young and ignorant people to such undermining influences is a real menace to the moral fiber of the nation.

Scenes of murder, robbery, and other crimes, especially where suggestive details are given, form a large percentage of the cuts. It is claimed, on much reliable authority, that juvenile delinquency in many cases is traceable to the crime suggestions received from films of the above character.

It has been found that managers of motion picture exchanges, and other persons handling pictures in the State, are willing to cut the films in the manner directed by the Board. In only one instance during the past year has a case been carried to court. This was an appeal from the ruling of the Board on a film entitled "Some Wild Oats", a film originally passed on July 16, 1920, and the permit recalled May 20, 1925. The court vacated the latter order of the Board, sustaining the original order permitting the exhibition of the picture to segregated audiences of men only and women only.

REGULATION OF MOTION PICTURES

State regulation or licensing of motion pictures is no longer a theory. It has been tried in the States of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kansas, New York, Virginia and Maryland. The Maryland Board has been in existence since 1916. That in Ohio preceded it by three years. Nowhere has such legislation been repealed, once enacted.

How effectively censorship operates in keeping out immoral and salacious films cannot be accurately gauged by a review of films cut and rejected, as submitted in this report. The films which have been kept out of the State and which the producer does not care to have put on official record, and the common practice of revising films, especially for states having Censor Boards, must be allowed for in judging the public benefit derived from film supervision. The effect of censorship

at the studio is of the greatest importance, as the motion picture industry is, by degrees, being brought to realize that in order to retain continued public approval, the tone of the motion picture must be improved. The fact that the public has paid agencies to observe every movement, that nothing can be concealed, has forced the producer to make a more serious effort to keep his house in order.

It is universally acknowledged that the motion picture needs regulation, due both to the fact of the comparatively recent origin and rapid growth of the industry, and the tendency on the part of the producers to sacrifice moral and artistic standards to box office receipts. The time has not yet come when the public can hope to regulate film exhibitions by public approval alone unless that approval can be enforced through some effective form of legal control. Three methods of regulation are advocated, that of Federal censorship, State and Municipal Boards. The first method, to which the industry, as a whole, is opposed, would set standards for the entire country, and it is expected that states would abolish their boards, or conform to the Federal standards. Judging from the wide differences in eliminations made in films by State Boards, this result would not naturally follow. It has been demonstrated that public opinion in different sections of the country varies widely. The "Birth of a Nation" was suppressed in some localities. Cigarette smoking is banned in Kansas. Race questions are more acute in certain sections than in others. Films depicting strikes, radicalism, the struggle between labor and capital, etc., may not be regulated so easily for Kansas and New York.

Again Municipal censorship by cities and small communities places too great a burden of uncertainty on the industry. This method is adopted in about a dozen cities in the United States, including Chicago, Detroit, and Houston, Texas. The State is the logical geographical unit for the distribution of films, and inconvenience and delay are readily avoided by prompt examination of films intended for immediate exhibition. The State censor is responsive to local public opinion. His office is an extension of the police power of the State. He is governed by local conditions and laws. The public character of his work of necessity subjects him to constant criticism and newspaper publicity.

Federal censorship, as proposed, is not to be confused with the National Board of Review, an organization established in New York, and maintained by the motion picture industry. This Board reviews approximately 85 per cent of the films produced in the country. It is a purely voluntary organization with no legal power to enforce its decrees. Practically all of the films submitted to the State censors have already been passed by the National Board of Review, so cuts and rejections made by states are in addition to the action of this Board. The establishment of Federal censorship, where there is State censorship of films, is unnecessary. In principle it is an infringement of States' rights.

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION

The personnel of the staff of the Board during the past year has been as follows: Three commissioners, a chief clerk, junior clerk, four inspectors, an operator, and an operator's assistant.

All films, with the exception of duplicates, presented for censoring were screened in the projection room connected with the Board's offices at 211 North Calvert Street, Baltimore, one or more members of the Board passing on all subjects, and two or more members viewing all films for which an appeal was taken from any ruling of the Board. The inspectors' duties consist in visiting all theatres in the city and State to ascertain if cuts have been made in films as ordered, and to see that advertising matter conforms with the requirements of the law. A number of volunteer inspectors co-operate with the Board in looking after the "follow-up" work in the theatres, of which there are 91 in the city, and 102 in the State outside of Baltimore.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year, ended September 30, 1925, is appended. The report shows receipts from all sources, including censoring of films, sale of substitute seals, and fines, amounting to \$29,249.50. Disbursements for the same period amounted to \$22,207.24, leaving a surplus of \$7,042.26, which reverted to the State Treasury.

PROSECUTIONS

The exhibitors of Maryland, as a whole, have co-operated with the Board in enforcing the law. In the past year only one prosecution, resulting in a fine imposed, was instituted by the Board. In the cases of such minor violations as were detected, no wilful intent to evade the law was shown.

CONCLUSION

The Board desires to express to your Excellency its appreciation of your interest in the work of this department and your support of its policies.

The Board commends highly the efficient work of the entire clerical force and inspection department, and expresses its appreciation of the interest and assistance rendered by volunteer inspectors, State officials, civic organizations and the public in general.

Respectfully submitted,

GEORGE HELLER, *Chairman*

ASA C. SHARP, *Vice Chairman*

MARIE WHITE PRESSTMAN, *Secretary*

December 31, 1925

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF MOTION PICTURE CENSORS

REPORT OF FILMS EXAMINED

October 1, 1924—September 30, 1925

	Films Original	Films Duplicate	Reels Original	Reels Duplicate	Films Approved	Films Rejected	Films Eliminated
October-----	304	238	870	664	452	0	90
November-----	296	213	902	613	415	1	93
December-----	307	228	977	566	449	0	86
January-----	323	258	1,025	702	490	0	91
February-----	309	251	895	635	460	0	100
March-----	304	236	865	609	471	0	69
April-----	304	245	886	578	452	0	95
May-----	304	221	918	587	420	0	105
June-----	237	211	725	588	361	0	87
July-----	227	197	638	468	370	0	54
August-----	255	218	812	515	416	0	57
September-----	272	220	1,004	642	411	0	81
	3,442	2,736	10,517	7,167	5,167	*3	1,008

*One film finally rejected—Two passed in reconstructed form.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Films, Original -----	3,442		
Films, Duplicate -----	2,736		
Reels, Original -----		10,517	
Reels, Duplicate -----		7,167	
Films Approved -----			5,167
Films Rejected -----			3
Films Eliminated -----			1,008
	6,178	17,684	6,178

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF MOTION PICTURE CENSORS

REPORT OF FILMS EXAMINED

October 1, 1924—September 30, 1925

	Films Original	Films Duplicate	Reels Original	Reels Duplicate	Films Approved	Films Rejected	Films Eliminated
October-----	304	238	870	664	452	0	90
November-----	296	213	902	613	415	1	93
December-----	307	228	977	566	449	0	86
January-----	323	258	1,025	702	490	0	91
February-----	309	251	895	635	460	0	100
March-----	304	236	865	609	471	0	69
April-----	304	245	886	578	452	0	95
May-----	304	221	918	587	420	0	105
June-----	237	211	725	588	361	0	87
July-----	227	197	638	468	370	0	54
August-----	255	218	812	515	416	0	57
September-----	272	220	1,004	642	411	0	81
	3,442	2,736	10,517	7,167	5,167	*3	1,008

*One film finally rejected—Two passed in reconstructed form.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Films, Original -----	3,442		
Films, Duplicate -----	2,736		
Reels, Original -----		10,517	
Reels, Duplicate -----		7,167	
Films Approved -----			5,167
Films Rejected -----			3
Films Eliminated -----			1,008
	6,178	17,684	6,178

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF MOTION PICTURE CENSORS

BUDGET ACCOUNT

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS

For Fiscal Year Ended September 30th, 1925

Receipts

State Treasurer, direct to Board-----	\$21,594.65	
State Treasurer, through Comptroller-----	112.59	
Total-----		\$21,707.24

Disbursements

Operating Expenses:		
Salaries and Wages-----	\$16,269.12	
General Repairs-----	8.65	
Light, Heat and Power-----	284.56	
Office Supplies and Stationery-----	206.63	
Film Approval Seal-----	1,225.00	
Motion Picture Machine Supplies-----	69.29	
Office Equipment-----	199.28	
Motion Picture Equipment-----	177.24	
Rent-----	1,950.00	
Insurance-----	15.00	
Total-----		\$21,307.24
Balance September 30th, 1925-----		\$400.00

BANK RECONCILIATION:

September 30th, 1925

Union Trust Company, Baltimore, Maryland

Balance as per statement-----	\$406.50	
Check outstanding No. 456-----	6.50	\$400.00

MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF MOTION PICTURE CENSORS

RECEIPTS OF THE OFFICE

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND DISBURSEMENTS

For Fiscal Year Ended September 30th, 1925

Receipts

Fees, Original Reels, 10,517 at \$2.00-----	\$21,034.00	
Fees, Duplicate Reels, 7,167 at \$1.00-----	7,167.00	
Sale, Substitute Seals, 1,015 at \$1.00-----	1,015.00	
Fines -----	10.00	
Telephone Calls -----	20.00	
Interest on deposits-----	3.50	
Total-----		\$29,249.50

Disbursements

Salary, Sadie M. Dorsey-----	\$900.00	
Remitted to State Treasurer-----	28,349.50	<u>\$29,249.50</u>

BANK RECONCILIATION

September 30th, 1925

Union Trust Company, Baltimore, Maryland

Balance as per statement-----	\$2,665.25
Check No. 36 outstanding-----	<u>2,665.25</u>